

Improvements Continue at Iraq's Busiest Trauma Center

By Norris Jones
Gulf Region Central District

Baghdad, Iraq - It's the U.S. military's busiest trauma

center in the world.

Ibn Sina Hospital, built in 1964 and located in Baghdad's International Zone, has been operated by the U.S. Army

since October 2003. It has handled more than 13,000 emergency room visits, air evacuated over 10,000 patients, taken over 60,000 x-rays, accomplished 14,500 surgical hours, and given over 33,000 units of blood.

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) is overseeing a \$21.3 million Operations and Maintenance contract that includes funds for the repair and improvement of the 43-year-old structure.

"Currently we're renovating its laboratory area with new floors, counters and cabinets," says Dennis Graham, the USACE project engineer. "To date over 165,000 lab tests have been conducted there and these improvements will enhance the turn-around time."

He also noted renovations were continuing on the wards and living units as they strive to improve the quality of life for the wounded soldiers and

staff. "We constantly are trying to make things better." The hospital is currently manned by the 28th Combat Support Hospital from Ft. Bragg, NC.

"When a fallen soldier comes through the hospital doors, they have a 96 percent chance of survival," Graham is proud to point out. The Army obviously has some of the best doctors and nurses anywhere, he continued. "This facility truly is a 'House of Angels.'"

Graham has helped oversee a variety of renovations there since first reporting to Iraq in March 2005. Those projects include the construction of an outpatient clinic, a dental clinic, blood bank, "Return to Duty" barracks, a chapel, new central suction system, new oxygen storage building, and CT scanner placement. "It's been an honor to be part of this effort," he concluded.



(U.S. Army photo)

Hundreds of Iraqi families live in Baghdad's International Zone. Ibn Sina Hospital has delivered 20 newborns over the past year. This little boy weighed 2.8 kilos.

Al Mansour District Establishes Youth Soccer League

By Sgt. Jack Androski
1-5 Cavalry Regiment

BAGHDAD - In a move to build increased community development in western Baghdad, the Mansour District Advisory Council has partnered with both Coalition and Iraqi Security Forces to establish the Mansour Youth Soccer League.

The local government hopes the league will keep kids off the streets and engaged in healthy, team building activities.

Soccer is the one constant thread seen throughout Iraq, regardless of religion or political beliefs. Children are

constantly requesting soccer balls from patrolling Soldiers and playing pick-up games wherever possible. Local government officials in Mansour District recognized this and took action.

The league will encompass 12 individual neighborhoods that make up the DAC's area of responsibility. Of those 12 neighborhoods, there will be a total of 53 teams with a nearly 600 children who will compete in the summer league.

To aid in the establishment of the league, Iraqi Army and U.S. Soldiers donated soccer balls and have begun gathering funds for uniforms and soccer cleats

for the children.

"Soccer has been called the national sport of Iraq and the creation of this league will provide enjoyment for hundreds of children....and I like to thank both 1-5-6th IA and Task Force 1-5 Cavalry for the sports equipment that will benefit the children of Mansour during the summer holiday," said Kasim Hanoon, chairman of the Mansour District Advisory Council at the council's weekly meeting.

League organizers intend to culminate the summer league with a double elimination round-robin tournament in August.

Soldiers Proven in Combat by Ground, Air



(Photo by Spc. Alexis Harrison, 2-1 Cav. Public Affairs)

Above: Brigade adjutant, Maj. David Welch, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, awards the Combat Infantryman's Badge to Staff Sgt. Jahir Avila during a ceremony atop the palace on Forward Operating Base Prosperity in central Baghdad June 9.

Below: Wichita, Kan., native Spc. Benjamin Full, a UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter crew chief for Company A, 3rd Battalion, 227th Aviation Regiment, 1st Air Cavalry Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division, stands before his peers as his battalion commander, Lt. Col. Michael Shenk of Carlisle, Pa. pins on his Combat Action Badge during a ceremony June 8, at Camp Taji, Iraq. Full helped the pilots control an engine fire and then proceeded to treat injured Soldiers once the helicopter landed.



(Photo by Spc. Nathan Hoskins, 1st ACB Public Affairs)

Arabic Phrase of the Day

tbarra

**Defined:
contribute**

Iraq 3-Day Weather Report



Today

High: 108
Low: 89



Tomorrow

High: 110
Low: 83



Friday

High: 109
Low: 83

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Enough is Enough

Local Volunteers Jump into Coalition Fight Against Al Qaeda

By Spc. L.B. Edgar
7th MPAD

BAGHDAD - Initially, it was hard to distinguish friend from foe. The rag-tag Iraqis were armed with well-worn AK-47s, RPKs, PKCs and even a few Dragonoffs - all weapons commonly used against Coalition Forces. They traveled with weapons hanging out the windows of unarmored vehicles, while a "gunner" lay on the vehicle's roof as security.

This was not the scene the Soldiers of 1st Platoon, Company E, 2nd Battalion, 5th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, anticipated when they met the volunteers, a group of western Baghdad residents fed up with the status quo in their Abu Ghraib neighborhoods.

They had resolved to no longer endure the endless torture, beheadings and extortion, which had become all too common. These men joined forces to rid their communities, once and for all, of a plague of foreign fighters. They are willing to go to any length to defeat their sworn enemy, Al Qaeda in Iraq, said Spc. Angelo Moreno, 24, Bradley gunner with Company E.

"They wanted Al Qaeda out of their neighborhoods. Al Qaeda had been disrupting their neighborhoods and their way of living. They got tired of it and decided to take some action and help us out to take care of their families and their neighborhoods," explained the Denver native.

Forcing Al Qaeda out of Khandari, Al Haswa and Al Hamadania neighborhoods within Abu Ghraib, is what the volunteers want to accomplish, said Alawi Chiad Manaweer, a volunteer from the Al Janabi tribe.

"Before we felt scared from them (Al Qaeda members) because we don't have weapons like them. But now something different happened," said Manaweer through a translator. "There are two or three guys in a neighborhood who are bad. They set up IEDs (improvised explosive devices) for you (Coalition Forces).

Then you're going to imagine that everyone in this neighborhood is bad and (the residents) are terrorists. These Al Qaeda members are very bad. They are like poison for (the) Iraqi society."

Once an enemy, always an enemy?

For many of the volunteers, Al Qaeda in Iraq was not always the enemy. In fact, some tribe members were at one time supporting the terrorist organization either by turning a blind eye, supplying food and resources or possibly carrying out attacks, said Capt. Lawrence Obst, 28, the commander of Co. E.

The bulk of them have actively or passively supported Al Qaeda in the past. As they realized what Al Qaeda meant to do in Iraq, how they planned to rule, the fact they set up their own shadow government - a lot of these guys didn't know what they were getting into when they started dealing with Al Qaeda," said the native of Summit, N.J.

However, now having had a change of heart, volunteers are lining up to join with the Coalition fight against the extremists.

Part of the reason for the about face are the empty promises Al Qaeda in Iraq made to local supporters, said 1st Lt. Steve Klocko, 23, the platoon leader of Co. E's 1st Platoon.

"They were promised numerous things by Al Qaeda and Al Qaeda never came through, so they want to fight back and make the area safe for their families," explained the Pittsburgh native.

This is not the first time residents have turned on Al Qaeda in Iraq. In fact, it is becoming the trend, Obst said.

"The more moderate Sunnis have basically cut ties with Al Qaeda and Al Qaeda is a 'with us or you're against us, organization,' so, as soon as you cut ties with them that pretty much seals the deal. If you're not with them, you're at war with them," Obst said.

Consequently, the Soldiers forgive past transgressions and focus on Iraq's future.

"We don't ever ask them if they were insurgents. We stay away from that ques-

tion. That way we can develop a friendship with them and show them that we are actually going to work with them and can trust them," Obst said. "That way, in the long run, it should help us and make this place more secure."

The sudden decrease in violence is most telling, said Staff Sgt. Steven Creel, 34, a squad leader with 1st Platoon.

"We have not had any sniper fire since we started working with these guys. The IEDs on Route (Michigan, which is nearby) mysteriously disappeared," the Orlando, Fla., native said.

Tribal power

Turning Al Qaeda's would-be supporters into their enemies was no small task. In order to accomplish this feat, Soldiers drew on Iraq's tribal system, which has been a timeless source of power. By garnering support from local tribal leaders, Soldiers allied themselves with the people of the Abu Ghraib area, Obst said.

One side effect of an improved relationship with the tribes was the ability to have local disputes peacefully settled between tribal leaders. According to Obst, the Iraqi tribal system has mechanisms to peacefully resolve disputes and working through the systems in place behooves the Coalition, as well as Iraqis.

Though a tribal council does not always produce the desired effect, it is worth a try, Obst said.

"In most cases there is a fair outcome as opposed to the western belief that someone is getting his hand chopped off," he said.

Foreign fighters all to familiar

More threatening to peace in Abu Ghraib than tribal disputes or sectarian violence, the steady stream of foreign fighters into Baghdad threatens Iraq's fledgling government and Coalition Forces, as well as the people of Iraq, said Manaweer.

"They keep the Iraqi people to not be a good people, to not be a free people by

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A Day of Seeking Out Things that Go Boom!

By Maj. Sean J. Ryan
2-2 Inf. Div. PAO

FORWARD OPERATING BASE RUSTAMIYAH, Iraq - Military convoys do their best to avoid explosive formed penetrators and improvised explosive devices at all costs, since they are the leading cause of lives lost in Iraq. Checking the safety of the routes, ensuring convoys have plenty of fire support, medical care and working communications are second nature to Soldiers going on missions.

For the cavalry troops and combat engineers of Company E, 1st Squadron, 8th Cavalry Regiment, attached to 2nd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 2nd Infantry Division, their daily job entails route clearance to find explosive devices before any convoys come across them.

It may sound crazy to the average person, but along with their partners, the explosive ordnance disposal teams go searching for bombs every day.

This type of job is unenviable for most, but like Sgt. 1st Class Augusta Creech, the platoon sergeant for Company E's 1st Platoon based out of Fort Hood, Texas said, "It has to be done."

He said, if not, it gives more opportunities for the enemy to place IED's and EFP's and cause more American and Iraqi casualties.

"Despite the fact the process slows traffic down, the deadly routes have to be cleared and most residents are used to the daily process by now," said Creech, a Brooklyn, N.Y., native. "Despite the effort, it has not completely stopped the insurgents from



(Photo by Maj. Sean J. Ryan, 2-2 Inf. Div. PAO)

An explosive ordnance disposal team robot drives by an area suspected as a hiding place for a roadside bomb during a route clearance mission June 2.

placing explosive devices on the roads."

In order to get ready for the mission, teams prepare their vehicles and go over last-minute details with Creech before departing. The confident 18-year veteran remains focused on the mission at hand, as he has already been struck by IED's twice in his career, one during each rotation he has served in Iraq.

During this deployment, the vehicle he was riding in struck an IED that caused multiple burns to his driver, who is recovering in San Antonio, he said. Creech received minor injuries in both incidents, but was able to return to duty both times. He fully realizes his good fortune.

His constant leadership is one of the many reasons Spc. Robert Perkins, the driver for today's mission and fellow combat engineer, feels more confident with Creech in the vehicle with him, providing guidance.

"My platoon sergeant is very calm in situations I believe many others would not handle well or freak out," Perkins, of Greenville, N.C., said. "I think my platoon

sergeant's calm demeanor is amazing. I was very scared about going out on missions at first, but a high quality non-commissioned officer such as Creech...helps take the pressure off everybody."

Clearing the most dangerous routes in Baghdad starts off no different than the rest with Perkins, as the driver, and Sgt. Edward Cruz, the team chief, seated next to him.

Cruz is steadfast and his job today is scanning the area for possible explosive devices with binoculars and other technical devices. Creech is in the back orchestrating the mission and acting as the liaison with the rest of the convoy.

The mission goes as planned in the first hour until suddenly, Cruz notices something out of place. The Sacramento, Calif. native instructs the convoy to halt.

Many Iraqi drivers are clearly annoyed they have to stop when the convoy stops. Without an understanding of the possible consequences, they quickly pop the curb and start driving against traffic on the opposite side of the street. In Iraq, this is commonplace.

Soon, two lanes are replaced by three, going both directions.

An EOD vehicle swerves into action, getting closer, but not in harms way to the suspected object. The vehicle downloads a robot to check the area more closely.

Heavily armed Bradley Fighting Vehicles get into position to start blocking traffic on both sides of the road, much to the chagrin of the daily commuters. The EOD team begins to track a wire seen by Cruz, as the robot is sent in to get a closer look.

Unfazed, some of the locals continue to walk past the area despite the halted convoy and stalled traffic. Sharp-eyed kids catch a glimpse of the robot and wave and motion for it to come closer. Parents push them back and keep them further away from the scene, realizing the severity of the situation.

Time passes, but this is not a process to be worked in haste. Finally, the EOD gives a signal of thumbs up meaning an explosive device is found. The area is cordoned off from the many onlookers and soon a call of "fire in the hole" is bellowed by Creech. The ordnance is blown in place with a boom that resonates throughout the area.

"The stretch of road we cover often slows down in regards to the number of explosive devices found, and then seems to pick up for unknown reasons," Cruz said. "But, to continue foiling the enemy, the tips given to the command after completed missions from all Soldiers, down to the private level, benefits everybody."

It's both thumbs up and smiles from both Cruz and Perkins. Creech remains composed as usual but is obviously proud of his Soldiers.

Locals Join Coalition Against Common Enemy

Al Qaeda

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making VBIEDs (vehicle-borne explosive devices) and placing IEDs," he said.

Abu Ghraib is an access point for foreign fighters heading into Baghdad. Co. E is trying to block access and deny safe haven to such undesirable individuals, said Klocko.

The presence of Soldiers in neighborhoods is to have a "Stabilizing effect on the population (since it) is one of the gateways into Baghdad. So, by blocking and disrupting Al Qaeda here, we have an impact across the division," Obst said.

Though most of the leadership is foreign, many of the foot soldiers are local. Desperate Iraqis, who feel caught into between a rock and a hard place, end up working for Al Qaeda to make end's meet, he said.

According to Manaweer, the Iraqi people are a good people who are suffering in the midst of a battlefield.

"Most of the violence comes from outside Iraq," he said.

Though Sunnis outnumber the Shia in this northwestern portion of the Iraqi capital, violence between the sects is not the problem residents face. In some cases Sunnis marry Shia in Abu Ghraib. The volunteers are almost perfectly representative of the area with 70 percent Sunni and 30 percent Shia, Obst estimated.

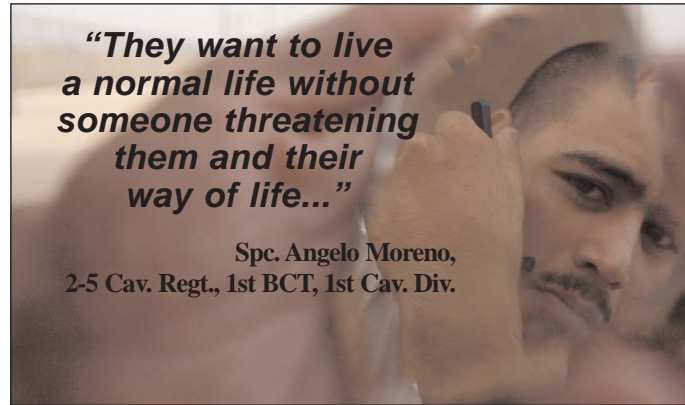
"The war is against Al Qaeda, at least in this area," he said.

Baghdad Security Plan

With Operation Fardh Al-Qanoon, commonly referred to

"They want to live a normal life without someone threatening them and their way of life..."

Spc. Angelo Moreno,
2-5 Cav. Regt., 1st BCT, 1st Cav. Div.



(Photo by Spc. L.B. Edgar, 7th MPAD)

The face of Denver native Spc. Angelo Moreno, a gunner with Company E, 2nd Battalion, 5th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, is reflected in a mirror while he shaves outside Joint Security Station Luzon in the Abu Ghraib District of Baghdad May 27.

as the Baghdad Security Plan, well under way, Coalition Forces and their Iraqi partners are occupying many sections of Baghdad having cleared them in the preceding months. Now the objective is to hold the cleared areas by occupying them with Soldiers and Iraqi Security Forces. Joint Security Station Luzon is one of many efforts underway in Iraq's embattled capital, Klocko said.

JSS Luzon, which was until recently the abandoned Sheik Gari Railway Station in the Khandari neighborhood of Abu Ghraib, houses Co. E and a fluctuating number of volunteer policemen, he said.

Once complete, JSS Luzon is slated to accommodate approximately 40 to 50 Soldiers and 100 to 200 official Iraqi Police at any given time. The IPs will be tasked with security while the Soldiers' mission will be to guide them and act as a quick reaction force. Once the IPs are sufficiently capable of securing the area, 200 to 300 IPs will call

the JSS home and Soldiers will step back, Obst said.

The goal is for JSS Luzon to mirror some of the success enjoyed at the nearby

Nasser Wa Salem IP station where volunteer policemen provided intelligence to Iraqi Army soldiers of 3rd Battalion, 4th Brigade, 1st Iraqi Army Division, which led to the killing and injury of two Al Qaeda members. Since the volunteer policemen began working with the Iraqi Army, there has been a significant decrease in attacks, Obst said.

Hand-in-hand transition

Although it's still early, the success stories of JSS Luzon are encouraging signs of progress to the Soldiers who are fortifying the structure one sandbag at a time.

"What's going on here is locals are rising up to say. 'We don't want Al Qaeda here and we want peace,'" Obst said. "It definitely has the potential to help us create a secure Iraq."

The area surrounding the JSS has seen the most dramat-

ic changes.

"Just a few months ago, you couldn't drive down that road without definitely getting hit by an IED," Klocko said. "The reason we are moving out here is so that we can develop a better rapport with the volunteers, IPs and also the people within the area."

Klocko said he and his Soldiers like what they're seeing from the volunteer policemen, as well.

"The volunteers are extremely motivated and willing to work. They refer to themselves now as soldiers and they won't do anything without permission from their chain of command," he said.

Working hand-in-hand is one of the benefits of JSS Luzon.

"It helps us to know one another. In order for them to really trust us we got to be able to work with them. They stay here so we get to interact with them a lot. They get to know we're not just foreign Soldiers; we're actually people just like them trying to do our job and go home," Moreno said.

Soldiers like Moreno find quite a bit of common ground with the volunteers who are stepping up to do their part in securing Baghdad.

"They want the same thing as we do. They just want to be able to go home with their wife and kids. They want to live a normal life without someone threatening them and their way of life," he said. "It's the same thing back home. You just want a normal neighborhood where you watch your kids grow up and have some peace."